

APPENDIX AA

Library of Ideas

Patent records there date back to days of George Washington

By DALE F. MEAD



Librarian Dottie Thompson advises Larry McQuillan on his research.

goal to test the originality of that secret.

Dan Henderson of Union City, an ex-IBM employee, already has one product out through his company—Innovad: Kid-A-Id, a credit card-sized, preprogrammed telephone dialer for a key chain or wallet. Put it to a phone receiver and press the button, and it phones home. Henderson, inspired by renowned Japanese inventor Kazuo Hashimoto, who devised the first telephone answering machine in 1938, is now researching several other ideas.

"This is a great asset in having home," says Henderson, who uses the library frequently.

First-timer Larry McQuillan of Sunnyvale echoes the same sentiment. "We're pretty lucky to have this so close by," he says.

An economist, McQuillan wants to verify that the trademark for his pending newsletter isn't already taken. "I'm trying to figure all this out," he comments. "I'll know in a half-hour; that's when I get on the computer."

Joanna Schirle of Morgan Hill also spends her time perusing the trademark files, clearing a fictitious name for her small business, through which she intends to market a product to help students study for their Graduate Record Examinations.

She's found another pay-off for her research. "I'm writing down names of companies that I might market my product to. If I decide to sell [the rights to] it in a couple years, there are all sorts of companies [with similar products] that might want to make it part of their product line," Schirle says.

Another frequent user, Fred O'Leary of Cupertino, sees the facility as a historical gold mine for his hobby, collecting corkscrews. Initially, he wanted to track down the patents for those in his collection; now he intends to track down every corkscrew ever patented. Corkscrews had many other uses besides opening wine bottles at the turn of the century.

"I suspect there are a thousand corkscrew patents," says O'Leary, who spends 1-6 hours a day at the library, going for the magic number. "I'm in the high nine hundreds now. I just go through the books."

"We were lucky to get three people a day when we got this thing started up," said recently retired attorney Jack L. Bohan of Los Altos, who launched the library in 1962 at age 29. "I went in there a week ago," says Bohan, now 61. "I was amazed. There were 30 people."

Orchard-laden Santa Clara Valley refused to tout itself as the "Valley of the Heart's Delight." But Bohan took one look at the burgeoning high-tech institutions—Westinghouse, General Electric, IBM, the Ames Research Center and Stanford University's high-impact engineering programs—and knew what they would need.

"It seemed to be a good idea to have these patents for the people in these professions to look at," he recalls. "The three millionth patent was scheduled to be issued in September 1961. I thought that would be a good point for a library to start."

The challenge wasn't money—a subscription for copies of all patents issued cost \$50 per year—but finding a library that could handle the foot-tall stacks of paper published every week.

"I checked several other libraries," Bohan says. "San Jose had no room for their existing facilities; San Francisco likewise. Sunnyvale wasn't loaded with space, but they were intrigued with the idea. After six months, the City Council agreed to spring for the \$50." Patent files started arriving at City Hall in January 1962. Two years later, "one wall of my garage was stacked up with these things," he says.

When organizers found a temporary facility on Arques Avenue across from the current Bank of America branch, Sunnyvale's Boy Scout troop helped organize the files over two weekends so that they would be easier to search.

The response inspired the city to provide a permanent home in an abandoned firehouse on Fair Oaks Avenue in 1965. The patent library became part of the city's main library in March 1971, four months before the firehouse burned down. Nearly 10 years later, the patent library moved to its current location.

The Patent Information Clearinghouse also subscribes to government records for trademark search-

es. A few years ago, the personnel conducted searches for a modest fee, but according to Glushenok, they now provide assistance because the computer system makes the task much simpler.

The library often serves clients it never sees. "Many companies set up accounts with us," Glushenok explains. "We charge fees and send copies to their offices."

Large corporations don't have to use the library for their searches. They can subscribe to on-line services more sophisticated than the facility can offer. But those services charge a hefty sum to print out files on-line. Many companies order copies from the clearinghouse instead. Even at \$3.55 per patent and 90 cents a page, plus any special charges, the client comes out ahead.

"We had one company ask for 50 patents," librarian Dottie Hamilton says. "We sent them the next day, and the company got them the following day by noon. Sometimes a

company will need a patent by two-hour fax because they're going to court." The staff makes sure that the clients get it.

That level of service has made the library a moneymaker for the city. Last year, it brought in revenues of \$280,000 with expenditures of \$237,000, putting \$43,000 in Sunnyvale's General Fund.

In addition to offering efficiency and fiscal self-sufficiency, the patent library also exudes a spare intellectual charm borne of equality and mystery. The shelf-lined rooms lure a steady stream of strangers, each playing a private game of chess that can take minutes to lose or years to win. The person that one passes in the stacks or that waits for a turn to use the computer could be a harebrained Walter Mitty with a vague idea, an unsung genius living off inventor's royalties or anything in between. You can't tell by looking. All visitors have in common is a secret and a

The garage-based business symbolizes the entrepreneurial spirit of Silicon Valley, but the patent library is closer to reality. Many of the firm enterprises have started with someone poring over patents than have started on the other side of a garage door in a sun-blasted car.

And now in the Bay Area is a patent library closer than the mythical entrepreneur.

In fact, Sunnyvale's Patent Information Clearinghouse, as it's formally called, is the only one in the Sacramento, and people sometimes drive here from the Capitol. The library does not have copies of every patent issued by the U.S. Patent Office. The Sunnyvale facility does—and the latest trademarks too.

Sacramento? That's nothing without the Rocky Mountains? We get professionals, larger corporations and small entrepreneurs," supervising librarian George Glushenok explains. "We had people from Redding, Luis Olispu and Ukiah. Patent inquiries come here. I had one in Boulder, Colorado. I mentioned to him that Denver had a patent library. He said it wasn't as good as ours."

Way in a residential neighborhood, the library stands in rectangular Building 7 of the Raynor City Center, south of Dunford between Partridge and Quail streets. It doesn't even have a sign on it, only lettering on the front that reads "LIBRARY JRS Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sat 12 p.m. to 5 p.m." A sign hanging from the canopy reads "Entrance."

The four-room, single-story structure contains copies of 1.5 million patents on paper as well as 300,000 copies of patents all the way back to Patent No. 1, signed by George Washington in 1790, for an improved method of making ink. Patents from No. 4,937,368 to last month's issues can be accessed easily on two computers.

computer disks (CD-ROM) are updated weekly. Demand for the computers necessitates reservations and a time limit of 15 minutes when others are waiting, usually are.

THE SUNNYVALE SUN, AUGUST 23, 1989